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FULFILLED PROPHECY

The many lines of internal evidence presented in lesson eight and the external evidence presented in lesson nine, are enough to convince most people that the Bible is the Word of God. But the two most conclusive proofs remain to be covered. They are fulfilled prophecy, and, the resurrection of Jesus.

There are two ways God can attest His revelation to man – by miracles, and, by fulfilled prophecy. Miracles are of greatest value to those who actually witness them. Prophecy is of greatest value to those who can see its fulfillment. Today, we have the testimony of those who witnessed the Biblical miracles, and, while we were not privileged to see those miracles, we can test that testimony by the accepted rules of evidence.

In addition, we have the advantage of seeing how hundreds of Bible prophecies have been fulfilled.

Peter wrote to early Christians, who had seen the fulfillment of many prophecies, that they had the word of the prophets "made more certain", and thus it was to them evidence of the truth like "a light shining in a dark place."

And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (II Pet. 1:19-21).

Prophecy is powerful proof because, as Peter emphasized, it must come from God. Only God knows the future. For example, consider the dismal record of economic forecasters and political pundits in our own time. Who can tell us what the stock market will be doing a year from now, or even a month away? Or who can name our president 20 years from now, or tell us what world events will occur even in the next year?...

Yet the Bible contains hundreds of prophecies, some fulfilled in a few years, some not for centuries. And God made it clear that this is a sure mark of His truth, and challenged the false gods of paganism:

"Present your case," says the LORD. "Set forth your arguments," says Jacob's King. "Bring in your idols to tell us what is going to happen. Tell us what the former things were, so that we may consider them and know their final outcome. Or declare to us the things

to come, tell us what the future holds, so we may know that you are gods. Do something, whether good or bad, so that we will be dismayed and filled with fear. But you are less than nothing and your works are utterly worthless; he who chooses you is detestable (Isa. 41:21-24).

PROPHECIES CONCERNING CHRIST

The most important and most abundant prophecies in the Bible are those concerning Christ. The Old Testament contains over 300 of these Messianic prophecies. In their preaching and writing, the apostles made frequent reference to the Old Testament passages concerning the coming Messiah, and how they had been fulfilled in the life of Jesus.

Jesus also stressed the importance of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming Messiah, and even chided His followers for being surprised when these prophecies were fulfilled in His life.

He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself (Luke 24:25-27).

Some examples of Messianic prophecies follow:

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;

and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen. 12:1-3).

And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, “Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed” (Acts 3:25).

When Moses wrote this Genesis passage, the Jews were God’s chosen people, and any prediction that all peoples would be blessed through them was foreign to their thinking. Even when Peter repeated this prophecy 15 centuries later (as recorded in the verse from Acts) he had no idea that the Gospel message was for non-Jews too. Yet, within a few years the fulfillment began and continues to our own time – peoples all over the earth are being blessed by the Good News about a descendent of Abraham.

“See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the LORD Almighty (Mal. 3:1).

Here, centuries before Christ, the prophet stated that a messenger would be sent to prepare His way, obviously fulfilled by John the Baptist, and states that the Lord would come suddenly into His temple, which He did. Since the temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D., this was also a prediction that the Messiah would come before that date.

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times (Micah 5:2).

Again, centuries before Christ, the prophet names the little village where He would be born.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this (Isa. 9:6-7).

Isaiah, writing about 7 centuries before Christ, tells us that He would be a Mighty God, etc., and that He would be an eternal King, the increase of His government never ending. Yet the same prophet wrote these words about the coming Messiah:

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no

violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the LORD'S will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors (Isa. 53:3-12).

How could the same Messiah be a Mighty God and an Eternal King, yet also be despised and rejected by men and be cruelly put to death? The Jewish scribes wrestled with this paradox for centuries without finding the answer, but now that it has all been fulfilled, we can see how beautifully it all came to pass in the life of Jesus.

When prophecy contains numerous detail, all of which is exactly fulfilled, that is infallible proof that the prophecy is from God. Consider some of the detail contained in this passage from Isaiah, all of which we know, from many sources, was exactly fulfilled:

- He was despised and rejected.
- He was a man of sorrows.
- He was pierced, beaten and wounded.
- He did not defend Himself from the Jews' accusations.
- He died under judicial sentence and not by mob violence or at the hand of an assassin.
- He died with criminals.
- He was buried by a rich man.

- After the suffering He would see the light of life.
- He would be satisfied with the result of His suffering.
- His suffering would save many.
- He would be exalted because of His suffering.

Consider this detailed description of the crucifixion, written by David a thousand years before Christ, long before the Romans had devised this cruel method of execution. David couldn't have known this on his own and probably did not understand what he wrote. Yet he vividly describes the agony of the cross, the piercing of the hands and feet, the bones out of joint, the pressure in the chest, the dehydration. He describes the enemies of Jesus surrounding the cross to mock Him and even quotes some of the insults they would hurl. He actually foretold that the soldiers would divide His garments among them, casting lots for the best piece of clothing.

But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: "He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him." Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you even at my mother's breast. From birth I was cast upon you; from my mother's womb you have been my God. Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help. Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me. Roaring lions tearing their prey open their mouths wide against me. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones; people stare

and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing (Psa. 22:6-18).

For an amazing example of the minute detail contained in some prophecy, note the last sentence of this passage from Psalm 22. "They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing." Here the Holy Spirit seems to contradict himself. First He says they will divide Christ's garments among themselves, and then He says they will cast lots for the clothing. Which will it be? For the answer we turn to John's Gospel:

When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. "Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it." This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled which said, "They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing." So this is what the soldiers did (John 19:23-24).

Remember, David wrote this amazing bit of prophetic detail about 1000 years before it happened exactly as he had written. Can there be any reasonable doubt that the Holy Spirit told David what to write?

The claim has been made that Jesus deliberately set about fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies. Note that this is an admission that Jesus did fulfill them, and it is also an admission that this country carpenter was at least a genius, who had better understanding of the scriptures than all the Jewish wise men. But, of course, the answer to this charge is the obvious fact that many of these prophecies were fulfilled by His

enemies, persons over whom He had no control. Paul pointed this out in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch:

Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath (Acts 13:26-27).

The large number of prophecies concerning Christ, many of which could be fulfilled only by His enemies, and the minute detail found in many of them, make it impossible for Jesus and His followers to have deliberately set about fulfilling the Messianic prophecies. Thus, the only reasonable explanation is that these prophecies came from the omniscient God who knows the future.

PROPHECIES CONCERNING THE JEWS

The story is told that Frederick the Great of Prussia, who was inclined toward skepticism, once said to one of the pastors of his realm: 'Reverend Sir, what is the most convincing proof you can give me of the divinity of Christ and the inspiration of the Scriptures?' The clergyman hesitated not a moment, 'Sire,' he replied, 'the most convincing proof of the divinity of Christ and the inspiration of the Scriptures that I, or any other person, could give you, is the history of the Jewish people.'

Survey Course in Christian Doctrine, Vol III and IV,
C.C.Crawford, College Press, 1964, page 279

Truly, the Jews are the most remarkable people in all history. The nation was founded by Abraham, at

the direction of God, for the specific purpose of blessing all mankind by bringing the Son of God into the world. For centuries the Jews lived with this sense of purpose. For centuries they longed for the coming Messiah. To even suggest, that when the Messiah did come, He would be despised and rejected by His own people, seemed unthinkable. Yet this was repeatedly predicted in the Bible, and is exactly what came to pass.

We have already considered passages from Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22, which describe in detail how Christ would be rejected and crucified. Psalm 118 contains this prediction:

The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes (Psa. 118:22-23).

It was indeed a marvelous thing that the builders, the Jewish leaders, would reject the very One they had waited centuries for. Jesus, after telling a parable that illustrated how the Jews would reject the Son of God, and how others would take their place, used this same Psalm to clinch the point:

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes"? Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed." When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them (Matt. 21:42-45).

Moreover, Jesus made it clear that the Jews rejec-

tion of Him would not be just a temporary misunderstanding, but would continue and would bring terrible consequences for the Jews.

I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 8:11-12).

Shortly before His crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples of the coming destruction of their homeland:

Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down"(Matt. 24:1-2)

Jesus went on to describe the terrible suffering and slaughter that was coming upon the Jews, and then said:

I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened (Matt. 24:34).

The Roman legions moved into Palestine in 66 A.D. and devastated the nation, finally destroying Jerusalem and the temple buildings in 70 A.D. The Jewish historian Josephus tells in great detail of the horrible suffering and slaughter of the Jews – all just as Jesus had predicted. The remaining Jews were scattered throughout the world, but even then their troubles did not end. Fifteen centuries before Christ, Moses

had predicted with amazing detail and accuracy, just what would happen.

Then the LORD will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other. There you will worship other gods—gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known. Among those nations you will find no repose, no resting place for the sole of your foot. There the LORD will give you an anxious mind, eyes weary with longing, and a despairing heart. You will live in constant suspense, filled with dread both night and day, never sure of your life (Deut. 28:64-66).

As these, and other prophecies in the Bible warned, the persecution of the Jews has continued down through the centuries. Both night and day, they have dreaded the sound of the heavy boot. And yet, they have continued in their rejection of Jesus, the Son of God, who came in their very own nation, and in accordance with their very own Scriptures.

This spiritual blindness of the Jewish people is one of the greatest mysteries of all history. They are an intelligent, talented nation, justly famous for their spiritual insight. They have repeatedly demonstrated great zeal for God and great courage in defending the truth. Humanly speaking, Jesus Himself is a Jew, as were the apostles and all of the first Christians. Yet, the Jewish leaders and the great majority of the Jewish people, rejected their longed-for Messiah, and continue to do so.

From the perspective of Christian Evidences, the importance of all this is that the whole incredible story was foretold by Jesus, and even by Old Testament prophets. An illustration used by Dr. Crawford in his book cited above, is worth repeating:

I am reminded of a conversation reported to me recently as having taken place between a Christian elder and a young Jew. The two became engaged in conversation riding side by side on a train, and in the course of the talk the subject of religion was introduced. The elder informed the young Jew that he was a Christian, and held the office of elder in a congregation of Christians. Whereupon the Jew said: "I can't understand how you can believe all that stuff about Jesus being the Son of God." Then, after a pause, he added: "Just what are your reasons for believing it, anyway?" "You are one of the reasons," replied the elder. The other looked at him in astonishment for a moment, then asked, "Just what do you mean?" "What I mean is just this," answered the elder, "that one of the reasons why I believe in Jesus Christ is the attitude taken toward Him by you Jews. You reject Jesus. A great many of your people still despise Him. Very few of your people have ever accepted Him as their Savior. And that is exactly the attitude He said you would take. He foretold again and again in His teaching that His own people would reject Him and stumble on in blindness of unbelief. He foretold the desolation of your city and the dispersion of your people among all nations. He foretold the suffering and persecution that you have endured for your rebelliousness. He foretold the forfeiture of your election as the chosen people. And in all these matters your people have fulfilled His predictions in every particular."

As the German pastor told Frederick the Great, the history of the Jewish people is convincing proof of the divinity of Christ and the inspiration of the Bible.

A PROPHECY CONCERNING TYRE

The main city of ancient Tyre was on the mainland, but there was also a fortified city on an island about

half a mile off shore. In the 26th chapter of Ezekiel, the prophet foretold the destruction of Tyre by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar, but limited the destruction to the settlements on the mainland. He told in some detail how the siege would be conducted and the city destroyed. Then he made a very unusual prediction:

They will plunder your wealth and loot your merchandise; they will break down your walls and demolish your fine houses and throw your stones, timber and rubble into the sea (Ezek. 26:12).

The Babylonians broke down the walls and demolished the houses, but left the rubble where it fell. It appeared the last part of Ezekiel's prophecy would never be fulfilled. Why would anyone want to undertake the enormous task of throwing all those stones, timber and rubble into the sea? But about 250 years later, Alexander the Great came with his armies to attack the island city of Tyre. Lacking the ships to attack the Tyrian fleet, Alexander built a causeway out to the island. His soldiers fulfilled Ezekiel's prophecy to the letter, by throwing the stones, timber and rubble of mainland Tyre into the sea.

Many other examples could be given of prophecies concerning the fate of nations and empires and even individuals. Even if the Bible contained only one real example of fulfilled prophecy, that is, one prophecy containing such extraordinary detail as to preclude accidental fulfillment, such as those concerning Jesus, or those concerning the Jews, or the one concerning Tyre, and such prophecy is precisely fulfilled years, and even centuries later, that is a supernatural act — something that could come only from God. Yet the

Bible contains a great volume of such prophecy, much of it already fulfilled. No other book could possibly do this — only the Word of God.

Study Questions

1. Why did God use both miracles and fulfilled prophecy to attest His Word?

2. What did Peter mean when he wrote to early Christians that they had the word of the prophets “made more certain”?

3. What is the most important and abundant group of prophecies in the Bible?

4. Why did Jesus chide His disciples for being surprised and discouraged by His crucifixion?

5. Why did the prophecy that all nations would be blessed by the seed of Abraham seem unlikely to a Jew?

6. Why did Isaiah’s prophecies concerning Christ seem contradictory?

7. Give some of the details about the crucifixion of Jesus which David foretold in Psalm 22.

8. Why is it absurd to say that Jesus set about fulfilling all the prophecies concerning the Messiah?

9. Why is the history of the Jews convincing proof that Jesus is the Son of God?

10. What amazing prophecy did Ezekiel make concerning the city of Tyre?

